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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000319

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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT: OPPOSITION SEES LITTLE USE IN
HOLDING ELECTIONS

REF: SANAA 0273

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Calling the elections "pointless" and expressing doubt that any political agreement would prove sufficient, southern opposition figures in Aden appeared even further from compromise than their party brethren in Sana'a. Meanwhile, in the capital, the GPC's Central Committee voted in a secret meeting to go forward with the April 27 election date, regardless of opposition participation. The current political stalemate will likely damage both sides come election day, with the South seeming increasingly distant from discussions in the capital. End Summary.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

¶2. (C) In a February 16 meeting with Aden representatives of the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), the group was united in its support for southern issues and utter frustration with the political situation in Yemen. Ali Munasser, the Yemeni Socialist Party's (YSP) Aden Chief, said, "The elections are pointless. The wider political situation is the problem." He told PolOff that without facing broader issues) jobs, development, corruption, disenfranchisement) holding elections would not change anything for the South. Asked what would happen in the South if the elections took place without the opposition, Munasser said, "I fear violence." Deputy Chief of the Islah Party in Aden Governorate Abdul-Nasser Ba Habib added, "People will not let their rights be denied."

¶3. (C) Aden Chief of the Nasserite Party Mohamed al-Afif said that the only way he could see the JMP agreeing to an electoral compromise and delay of the elections (reftel) was if a neutral third party followed the agreement step-by-step, ensuring that the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) did everything it promised to do. (Note: The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has agreed to play this role if an agreement is reached between the GPC and JMP. End Note.) Islah's Ba Habib said that the European Union's recommendations for changes to the electoral law were the main condition for an electoral compromise. (Note: A GPC MP told Pol/E Chief on February 16 that the Parliament will pass these amendments "next week." End Note.) Among those present, Ba Habib seemed the most willing to compromise for the sake of elections. (Note: Islah, with the most seats in Parliament after the GPC, has the most to lose if the JMP boycotts the elections. End Note.)

¶4. (U) Aden's Governor and GPC party member Adnan Omer Al-Gefri was the only official PolOff spoke to in Aden who continued to support holding elections. Echoing the party line, Gefri told PolOff in front of several cameras and journalists, "The elections must and will take place on time. People talk about the JMP boycotting. If the JMP boycotts,

there are 22 registered political parties in Yemen, and these will compete." (Note: The JMP is generally considered the only viable opposition in Yemen. End Note.)

YSP'S LAST STAND

15. (C) According to Hisham Bashraheel, whose family owns and edits al-Ayaam, an independent southern newspaper in Aden, "If the YSP joins in the elections, it will be a death sentence for it." According to Hisham and his son Basha, the YSP has already lost so much legitimacy and popular support with southerners, its only remaining hope is to be the party that stands against the "excesses" of the GPC. Any political accord struck before the elections would be perceived as once again giving in to the GPC's "one-sided" demands, according to the Bashraheels. Sheikh Tariq Abdullah, a prominent lawyer in Aden, echoed this sentiment. He told PolOff on February 15 that even though he considers himself an independent, "The JMP has no choice but to boycott the elections. They will lose everything if they don't make a stand now."

MEANWHILE IN SANA'A ...

16. (C) In a secret meeting on February 16, the Central Committee of the GPC voted to proceed with the elections on April 27, regardless of opposition participation, according to GPC MP Nabil Basha (please strictly protect.) National Democratic Institute (NDI) Country Director Heather Therrien, whose organization is acting as a go-between for the two parties, however, thinks this vote will have little meaning.

She notes that the Central Committee has not been a significant part of the ongoing negotiations. She and NDI Regional Director Les Campbell told the Ambassador on February 17 that the two sides are within striking distance of an agreement. President Saleh told the Ambassador on February 18 that the GPC would shortly reach an understanding with the opposition as to whether or not they would participate in the elections. Discussions appear to be continuing, as YSP Secretary General Yassin Said Noman was seen driving into the Presidential compound as the Ambassador was leaving.

COMMENT

17. (C) It seems that even if a last-minute political deal is struck in the capital, it will not heal long-standing divisions in the South. Still, the outlook appears far bleaker if a deal is not struck and the GPC proceeds with one-sided elections. Either way, the YSP could prove the biggest loser, as it stands to lose influence in Sana'a and credibility in the South. END COMMENT.
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